

July 25 marked the 50th anniversary of the release of *Humanae Vitae*, one of the few redeeming aspects of the otherwise disastrous pontificate of Paul VI. The occasion evoked a fair amount of commentary in Catholic circles, even if relatively few Catholics concur that the use of contraceptives is [morally wrong](#). However, if Catholics are asked to recall any single statement of Paul VI, the few who can do so will probably identify with the pope's candid and gloomy [remark](#) of 1972 that "the smoke of Satan has entered the Church of God."

The current spate of sexual abuse scandals coming to light among the American Catholic hierarchy is proof, if it were needed, that the smoke of Satan has ignited into a roaring blaze. On July 28, the Vatican [announced](#) that Pope Francis accepted the resignation of Theodore McCarrick, archbishop emeritus of Washington, D.C. from the College of Cardinals over charges that he had sexually abused minors and adult seminarians over the course of decades. The pope further ordered McCarrick to a "life of prayer and penance" pending a canonical trial.

The Wages of Sin

Meanwhile, in Pennsylvania, six of the eight Catholic dioceses are facing a two-year-old [investigation](#) into clergy sexual abuse that is currently packaged in an 800-plus page grand jury report. In the Midwest, the diocese of Saginaw and its bishop are now coping with a [police investigation](#) for allegedly covering up sex abuse of multiple clergy. That includes the 2009 sexual assault of a maintenance man *in the diocesan cathedral* by a seminarian who went on to be ordained a priest. Out west, the bishop in charge of the diocese of Great Falls-Billings, Montana is now [soliciting](#) \$20 million from the faithful to cover a legal settlement with 86 victims of priestly sex abuse. It joins the [Helena diocese](#), which serves the other half of the state of Montana and which paid a similar amount to 362 abuse victims in 2015.

During the so-called [Long Lent](#) of 2002, when news of clerical sexual shenanigans (of all kinds) first exploded onto the national scene, we were assured that the bishops would swiftly set things right. They crafted the so-called [Dallas Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People](#) which would create a safe environment, heal and reconcile victims and survivors, cooperate with civil authorities, blah, blah, blah. As late as its [2014 annual report](#), the USCCB was virtually patting itself on the back, noting its "substantive progress." However, the same document noted that, during a recent 12-month period, the Church had paid out over \$119 million in settlements with victims and related expenses.

McCarrick, as archbishop of Washington, D.C., attended and no doubt shaped the 2002 reaction of the bishops in Dallas. In an [interview](#) with the *New York Times* just prior to the conference, McCarrick commented, "This crisis is more important than any crisis we've had

in my time. Our people are waiting for the bishops to say, O.K., we've got it under control, we're on the same page, we hear you and we've listened to you and now you can be sure that this will never happen again." In light of the long overdue revelations against McCarrick, this statement was nauseatingly hypocritical.

Vague and Pathetic USCCB Response

The first "[credible and substantiated](#)" allegation surfaced against McCarrick on June 20 (i.e., that he had sexually abused a teenage altar boy). Conveniently, this was one week after the USCCB's June 14-15 Spring General Assembly in Fort Lauderdale, thus obviating the bishops of the unpleasant task of directly confronting the outrageous behavior of one of their number. Even so, their immediate reaction was predictable, that is, vague and pathetic. In a press release obviously orchestrated to be released the same day as the first allegation, Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, USCCB President, made no mention of McCarrick by name (although the subject line of the document referred to him). DiNardo's [statement](#) read:

"As clergy in God's Church, we have made a solemn promise to protect children and young people from all harm. This sacred charge applies to all who minister in the Church, no matter the person's high standing or long service. This morning was a painful reminder of how only through continued vigilance can we keep that promise...I express my deep sadness, and on behalf of the Church, I apologize to all who have been harmed by one of her ministers."

Except for a reference to the Dallas Charter, that was all. Much sadness, much pain (the bishops excel at that), but no outrage.

We then fast-forward to July 28, when Pope Francis accepted McCarrick's resignation from the College of Cardinals, ordering him to prayer and penance prior to a canonical trial. DiNardo then issued this anodyne [statement](#):

"I thank the Holy Father for his leadership in taking this important step. It reflects the priority the Holy Father places on the need for protection and care for all our people and the way failures in this area affect the life of the Church in the United States."

Again, no leadership, no accountability. In cautioning against a rush to judgment, it must be

mentioned here that McCarrick [claims](#) to “have absolutely no recollection of this reported abuse” and believes in his innocence. However, the [claims](#) against McCarrick continued to mount from multiple dioceses and involved not just minors but adults with whom financial settlements were concluded. Likewise, a Catholic University canon law expert has [noted](#) to the *Washington Post* that this was the first time an order of penance and prayer had been issued before a Church trial actually occurs.

Silence Implies Consent

The bishops’ general silence about McCarrick can be interpreted in only one of two ways. Shockingly, there are surely some who don’t regard his perverse behavior as a big deal, but what else can we expect when the smoke of Satan has entered the Church? Within this crowd is likely Cardinal Kevin Farrell, whose see-no-evil video with the Catholic News Service was deftly skewered by Elizabeth Yore, a child protection attorney and Catholic writer/speaker, [here](#). Most bishops, however, likely wish McCarrick would simply disappear. If so, their silence is not enough. Silence implies consent (*qui tacit consentire*), as St. Thomas More reminded us in *A Man For All Seasons*. Another Catholic journalist, Christopher Manion, has [called for](#) the resignation of all bishops who were aware of the ongoing abuse crisis in the hierarchy but failed to intervene.

Fortunately, at least one Texas [bishop](#) has demonstrated the backbone to confront evil in the face and has even mentioned the “L word” (laicization) for McCarrick. Collectively, however, the bishops seem to reserve their outrage for social issues, such as the Trump Administration’s policy on illegal immigration. In so doing, they not only are misinterpreting their divine mission to save souls; they are exhibiting a striking sense of tone-deafness to the faithful in the pews. The bishops would do well to recall the fury of Christ in cleansing the temple of its money-changers, an event that is mentioned by all four evangelists. Is He any less outraged by the deviant and immoral behavior of His shepherds today?

A final observation: Pity the poor graduates of [Cardinal McCarrick High School](#) in South Amboy, New Jersey, whose doors closed in 2015 for financial reasons. The fact that McCarrick lent his name in 2001 to that Catholic institution is indicative of his arrogance and total disregard for the scandal that would inevitably ensue from his reckless behavior. For his sake, may he truly repent before he goes to his particular judgment.